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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 24 October 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Bouheddou (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Algeria)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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Agenda item 119: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures (*continued*)

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In the absence of Mr. Kmoníček (Czech Republic), Mr. Bouheddou (Algeria), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 118: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.7

1. **Mr. Elnaggar** (Egypt) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.7 on behalf of the Chairman.

2. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.7 was adopted.*

Agenda item 119: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Outsourcing practices (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.4

3. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.4 on behalf of the Chairman.

4. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.4 was adopted.*

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on management audit review of outsourcing in the United Nations and United Nations funds and programmes (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.5

5. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.5 on behalf of the Chairman.

6. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.5 was adopted.*

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on common and joint services of United Nations system organizations at Vienna (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.6

7. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.6 on behalf of the Chairman.

8. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.6 was adopted.*

Agenda item 120: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*)

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on United Nations system revenue-producing activities (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.8

9. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.8 on behalf of the Chairman.

10. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.8 was adopted.*

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on support costs related to extrabudgetary activities in organizations of the United Nations system (*continued*)

Draft decision A/C.5/58/L.3

11. **Mr. Kendall** (Argentina) introduced draft decision A/C.5/58/L.3, drawing attention to an error in the Spanish version of the text.

12. **The Chairman** said that the Secretariat had taken note of the error and would correct it.

13. *Draft decision A/C.5/58/L.3 was adopted.*

Agenda item 134: Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.9

14. **Mr. Kendall** (Argentina) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.9 on behalf of the Chairman.

15. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.9 was adopted.*

Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.10

16. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa) introduced draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.10 on behalf of the Chairman.

17. *Draft resolution A/C.5/58/L.10 was adopted.*

Agenda item 130: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*) (A/57/747; A/58/294 and A/58/364)

18. **Mr. Sun** Xudong (China) welcomed the recommendations contained in the report of the Office

of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) (A/58/364), which would contribute to the improvement of management and efficiency and the achievement of cost savings in the United Nations. However, he noted with concern the Office's claim, with regard to the waste and fraud it had exposed, that the actions recommended by it, if implemented, would save the Organization approximately $37 million.

19. The case of the former senior staff member of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) who had misappropriated $4.2 million had exposed serious deficiencies in the financial management of the Mission that needed to be corrected so as to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. The OIOS recommendations on the requisitioning function of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations also merited serious consideration.

20. Noting that, of the 2,737 recommendations issued by the Office during the year under review, 50.6 per cent had already been, or were being, implemented, he called for all OIOS recommendations, particularly critical recommendations, to be carefully studied by the departments concerned and implemented in a timely fashion. His delegation recognized that implementation rates increased with the passage of time, as demonstrated by the rate of 90.6 per cent for recommendations issued between July 1999 and June 2000, and that when the management of the United Nations improved, the number of recommendations would fall. Lastly, it noted that, only by identifying and resolving problems could the Organization do a better job.

21. **Ms. Pfisterer** (Switzerland) welcomed and endorsed the annual report of OIOS (A/58/364). It was encouraging to note that about half of all the recommendations had already been implemented and that OIOS had identified substantial potential savings within the United Nations, of which a considerable proportion had already been recovered. Her delegation had followed with great interest the launching of the organizational integrity initiative the previous May and agreed with OIOS on the importance of integrity and professional ethics in the Organization. In that context, it was particularly pleasing to learn of the recovery of $4.2 million that had been misappropriated by a former senior staff member of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

22. Her delegation welcomed the new approach taken by OIOS to identify key risk areas in oversight work; the application of a risk-management framework to its annual work plan would enhance the overall effectiveness of the Office and should lead to an improved selection of oversight assignments to focus on areas that had the greatest exposure to fraud, waste, abuse, inefficiencies and mismanagement. Her delegation greatly appreciated the work of OIOS in promoting responsible administration of resources, a culture of accountability and transparency, and improved programme performance.

23. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that OIOS was to be commended for its development of a risk-management framework to target oversight assignments; for its emphasis on integrity, especially among senior managers; and for its role in promoting results-based management and managerial accountability.

24. The report before the Committee (A/58/364) clearly demonstrated the need for continuing efforts to change the culture of the Organization. There were still too many examples of inefficiency, waste and mismanagement in a variety of areas. In that connection, he called for immediate action to realize the remainder of the $37 million in savings recommended by the Office and to implement the 28 per cent of OIOS recommendations that remained outstanding.

25. With regard to the theft of $4.2 million by a senior UNMIK staff member, he asked how such a crime could have escaped the notice of that individual's supervisor and what steps were being taken to hold him or her accountable. Concerning the finance assistant at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda who had received kickbacks from defence teams, he had been appalled to learn that the charges against the staff member had been dismissed based on his unsupported claim that the funds from the defence investigators were loans that they were repaying. He would like to know what the status of the case was and why the staff member remained employed by the Tribunal. As to the former representative of the Secretary-General who had solicited at least $500,000 from donor countries by setting up an unauthorized informal financial system, similar to a United Nations trust fund, as well as falsifying mission subsistence allowance claims, he asked what safeguards had been put in place to ensure that such misconduct did not recur and why the

Secretariat had declined to take recovery action with respect to the mission subsistence allowance.

26. He expressed regret that the Standing Committee of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund had decided to discontinue the internal audit services of OIOS and instead establish its own internal audit unit against the advice of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). Notwithstanding the decision by the Pension Fund, OIOS would remain responsible, under its mandate, for the oversight of the Organization's resources and staff.

27. Managerial accountability was a recurrent theme in the OIOS report. In order to ensure that managers were held accountable, the United Nations must strengthen evaluation mechanisms and establish a tangible link between outcomes and resource requests. He welcomed the recently launched organizational integrity initiative and thanked the Government of Norway for providing the necessary funding. As the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services had stated, the United Nations must lead by example and ensure that integrity and professional ethics guided all its work.

28. Lastly, he proposed that the Committee should take note with appreciation of the OIOS report, thus saving meeting time for other issues.

29. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa) said that the work of OIOS was contributing to the Secretary-General's efforts to ensure greater accountability and improve performance throughout the Organization. The large number of OIOS reports that had been submitted to the General Assembly during the period under review, the wide range of issues covered and the potential cost savings and sums recovered bore testimony to the importance of having effective oversight mechanisms.

30. The annual report of OIOS (A/58/364) provided Member States with an opportunity to evaluate the performance of the Organization and monitor the effectiveness of its use of resources. Her delegation noted the increase in the number of recommendations of OIOS during the period under review in comparison with preceding years, in particular the number of critical recommendations, and appealed to programme managers to implement the recommendations without delay and to ensure that abuses such as those identified by OIOS did not recur. It was encouraging to note that the majority of critical recommendations over the previous three reporting periods had been implemented.

31. Her delegation attached great importance to oversight activities which, in particular, related to peacekeeping operations, humanitarian and related activities and development initiatives in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. The findings pointing towards instances of sexual abuse and exploitation, poor cash management, unreliable accounting practices, inadequate record keeping of mission equipment, alleged fraudulent activities and non-compliance with procurement guidelines were therefore a matter of great concern and remedial action needed to be taken to ensure the effective functioning of the Organization in the field.

32. Her delegation also viewed as essential the effective functioning of the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Office at Nairobi and was confident that the implementation of the OIOS recommendations would reinforce the positive roles to be played by the Commission and the Nairobi Office in advancing the development agenda in Africa.

33. The OIOS review of the operations of United Nations information centres (A/57/747) was timely but her delegation noted with concern the apparent inequity in the emphasis placed on United Nations information centres in developed and in developing countries. As pointed out by OIOS, information centres in developed countries which had easy public access to the Internet and library facilities demanded a managerial approach different from that which was appropriate in developing countries. Experience from developed countries could not be simply transplanted to developing countries and it was to be hoped that the Department of Public Information, in implementing the recommendations, would ensure the effective distribution of information about the United Nations while taking the unique needs of developing countries into account.

34. In conclusion, her delegation commended OIOS for attempting to rationalize its allocation of resources and improve the targeting of its oversight assignments by applying a risk-management framework to its annual work plan; she looked forward to consideration of the outcome of the resulting increased cross-disciplinary teamwork in OIOS later in the session and welcomed the ongoing consultations between the Office, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of

Auditors which, she hoped, would prevent any duplication of their functions and improve coordination between them.

35. **Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan) said that his country attached great importance to oversight functions and commended the work of OIOS.

36. His delegation welcomed the annual report of OIOS (A/58/364), in particular the strategy developed by OIOS of focusing on five main themes, as described in paragraph 124 of the report. It noted with interest, in particular, the use of a risk-management framework to identify and prioritize areas that were considered to have the greatest vulnerability to fraud, waste, abuse, inefficiency and mismanagement. In view of the importance of integrity to the Organization, his delegation would closely monitor the implementation of the organizational integrity initiative launched by the United Nations. Following the full incorporation of results-based budgeting in the budget process, results-based management was particularly relevant. His delegation looked forward to receiving the forthcoming programme performance report for the biennium 2002-2003, which would reflect the shift in focus from the implementation of outputs to results achieved. The backlog of cases to be investigated was highly undesirable and it was to be hoped that the investigation of those cases would be expedited and the backlog reduced by making use of the new posts that were currently approved.

37. Turning to the OIOS report on the audit of the functioning of the Headquarters Committee on Contracts (HCC) (A/58/294), he said that the recommendations would make a great contribution to improving the functioning of HCC and noted with satisfaction that most of the recommendations had been accepted by management and by the Chairman of HCC. Concerning the organizational placing of HCC (recommendation 1) his delegation felt that OIOS and management should continue to consult on that matter in view of the potential conflict of interest that existed. The threshold for HCC review of the threshold for procurement cases should be carefully considered by management, taking into account both the aspect of practicality and efficiency and the mandate of HCC. His delegation was concerned that most of the ex post facto or partial ex post facto cases did not meet the Procurement Manual's definition of exigency and asked for follow-up information concerning recommendation 5 to be provided to Member States in that connection.

38. Turning to the report on the review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres (A/57/747), he said that his delegation believed that the concept of regional hubs was a valid one from the viewpoint of improving efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, it was important to weigh what would be lost by closing existing United Nations information centres against the potential gain resulting from restructuring in terms of reinforced activities. The overall support of a host government would be fully taken into account rather than focusing on particular elements. Information in local languages had the strongest impact on local populations and the Department of Public Information should therefore continue its public information activities in various languages.

39. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco) said that it was highly important for the Organization to have internal control mechanisms to identify irregularities in management and to make recommendations to remedy them. Programme managers should take advantage of the recommendations which were aimed at enhancing the operational efficiency of the Organization.

40. Turning to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services covering the period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003 (A/58/364), she said that her delegation welcomed the fact that the report was viewed in the context of the organizational integrity initiative which had been launched earlier in the year and was designed to strengthen integrity and professional ethics in the Organization.

41. The workload of OIOS was constantly increasing and the Office had put in place a system of prioritizing the demands placed upon it. Such an approach could only enhance the efficiency of the work of the Office if it were applied in such a manner as not to distract attention from problem areas other than high-risk areas to which the Member States attached great importance.

42. The coordination that had been achieved between OIOS, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors, which would inevitably be of benefit to the Organization by avoiding duplication and overlapping of responsibilities, was to be welcomed.

43. Her delegation noted that the implementation rate of the OIOS recommendations barely reached 50 per

cent. Particular attention should be paid to that matter since implementation of the recommendations could improve performance and lead to a more rational utilization of the Organization's human and financial resources.

44. In conclusion, her delegation asked why the reports of OIOS had not yet been brought into line with the format for reports specified in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. Concerning the content of the report, her delegation wondered why OIOS continued to monitor compensation issues for the United Nations as a whole, despite the existence of a legal opinion which indicated that certain aspects of the matter were not within the mandate of the Office.

45. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) said that the annual report of OIOS demonstrated the hard work performed by the Office on behalf of the Organization. Her delegation was pleased, in particular, to note the strategic initiatives undertaken by OIOS to instil a management culture based on integrity, accountability and transparency. It was gratifying to note that over 50 per cent of all recommendations made by OIOS had been implemented by the management of the offices investigated and that savings and recoveries totalling some $37 million had been identified, of which some $15 million had already been collected. Her delegation was, however, concerned that, in some instances, there was no indication that the recommendations had been accepted or that there were plans to implement them. She also noted that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had still to provide responses in some areas.

46. There was no doubt that the Department of Public Information should reassess its approach to the United Nations information centres, particularly those in developing countries where the vast majority of the population had no access to information and communication technologies. The Department was one of the three pillars identified by Member States to help with the implementation of initiatives under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and any restructuring should therefore be carried out in such a way as to enable the United Nations information centres in developing countries to carry out their mandated activities. In conclusion, her delegation reaffirmed its support for OIOS and urged the Office to intensify its tripartite efforts in collaboration with the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors.

47. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) urged programme managers to implement fully the 67 per cent of outstanding critical recommendations of OIOS before 30 June 2004, to become fully involved in the development of the plans for their programmes and to take full account of the objectives and expected accomplishments, as well as the indicators of achievement used to measure their results.

48. **Mr. Ramlal** (Trinidad and Tobago) expressed his support for the work of OIOS in the context of its mandate to assist the Secretary-General in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandate of the Organization. He also welcomed the introduction of the OIOS organizational integrity initiative and the cooperation of the Office with the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors with a view to eliminating overlap and ensuring improved division of labour.

49. However, while he appreciated the efforts of OIOS to instil a culture of accountability, he wondered whether, bearing in mind its mandate as an internal oversight, investigative and inspection body, it was best placed to promote results-based management. It was not his intention to discourage OIOS from its proposed work in the area of enhancing self-monitoring and self-evaluation, but he felt that more thought should be given to how the Secretary-General and the General Assembly as a whole could best pursue the implementation of results-based budgeting and management.

50. Lastly, he felt that it might be beneficial for OIOS to focus more closely on its immediate work programme in order to ensure a greater success rate in the implementation of its existing recommendations.

51. **Mr. Jonah** (Sierra Leone) said that any organ that saved the United Nations $36 million had done its job well. He was particularly concerned about the report's findings that some United Nations staff members had committed serious transgressions. It was difficult to believe that staff members were capable of committing the acts described in the report and he wondered whether the entry of such persons into the United Nations system was a result of the rapid expansion of peacekeeping operations.

52. He wished to draw attention to the important role played by United Nations information centres in developing countries; they were often the only reliable

source of information about the United Nations that was available to students in those countries.

53. **Mr. Eljy** (Syrian Arab Republic) regretted the failure to implement many of the recommendations on savings and management of resources. The embezzlement of $4.2 million from the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) raised the issue of accountability. In his view, delegation of authority had not been matched by an effective system of accountability and due priority must be given to that issue.

54. His delegation was also disappointed at the preferential treatment given to United Nations information centres in the developed countries in terms of the number of posts and operations, despite the fact that the availability of technology gave the public in those countries easier access to information than the public in developing countries.

55. Lastly, in carrying out its audit activities, OIOS should remain within its mandate and not go beyond it, as it had done in some of the reports now before the Assembly.

56. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services), addressing the concerns that had been expressed about the number of staff members who had committed offences, said that the United Nations was a large Organization handling large amounts of money. Given that situation, it should come as no surprise that there would be cases of individuals who transgressed the rules and regulations. What was important was to bring such cases to light immediately and to ensure that there was no escalation in the trend. It was particularly important to look at preventive measures and that was why OIOS had launched an organizational integrity initiative. As to why some problems had gone undetected for long periods, he said it was not realistic to have 100 per cent oversight. It was possible, however, to implement measures to increase the rate of detection and to reduce and deter such cases. He wished to take the opportunity to remind members that in order to carry out its work effectively, his Office must be given adequate resources.

57. On the question of why the staff member who had received kickbacks at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was still employed, he said that he, too, had questioned that decision and agreed that it sent the mistaken signal that the Organization was prepared to tolerate such behaviour.

58. With regard to the format of his Office's annual report, in which recommendations were not highlighted in bold type, as required by the General Assembly, he explained that OIOS was merely reporting on recommendations it had already made and was not now submitting to the Assembly recommendations on which the Assembly was required to act.

59. Lastly, on the question of why OIOS was still auditing certain aspects of the work of the United Nations Compensation Commission, despite the legal opinion that it was outside its mandate, he pointed out that the legal opinion was with respect to claims made by the Commission. OIOS was of the view that, in order to protect the Organization and its assets, it should audit all processes leading up to the decisions on the claims.

Agenda item 119: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/58/81 and A/58/211)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures (*continued*)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the audit of the Investment Management Service of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (*continued*)

60. **Mr. Martini** (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the European Union was concerned about the excessive concentration of responsibility for the investments of the Pension Fund. It was also concerned about the use by the Investment Management Service of non-discretionary investment advisers, whose services had cost the Fund $15.2 million in the biennium 2001-2002, even though OIOS had found no evidence that their services had added significant value in terms of the Fund's individual equity transactions. Nor had OIOS found any comparable examples in investment industry practices of managers who had at their

disposal both full-service brokers and non-discretionary investment advisers. The European Union therefore shared the recommendation of OIOS that the practice should be thoroughly reviewed.

61. On the subject of a code of ethics for staff involved in investment management, the European Union noted the position taken by the representative of the Secretary-General, but agreed with OIOS that investment staff should follow a code of ethics established for professionals operating in the investment industry.

62. **Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan), referring to the report on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures (A/58/211), said that OIOS had provided a number of valuable observations and recommendations to streamline and rationalize administrative and financial functions. In particular, the review had revealed that the Secretariat did not take full advantage of technology despite the substantial investment that had been made in information technology. His delegation particularly commended the recommendations regarding the rationalization of the travel process, procurement and staff entitlements, and also agreed with the observation made the previous day by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services that the recommendations were also related to the larger issue of the need to adopt an enterprise-wide approach to the use of information technology in automating processes and to put policies in place that would hold staff accountable. In that connection, his delegation fully agreed that there was a need to redefine the role of the executive offices and the administrative offices in the Secretariat.

63. With regard to the audit of the Investment Management Service of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (A/58/81), he said that his delegation was very concerned about the alarming structural and organizational shortcomings of the Fund that had been identified by OIOS, such as the lack of an adequate supervisory framework and segregation, an excessive concentration of investment responsibility and a lack of monitoring of contract compliance or review of vendor performance. It was particularly concerned about the situation described in paragraphs 15 and 16 regarding the use of non-discretionary investment advisers. The observations of OIOS on that matter warranted careful review by UNJSPF.

64. **Ms. Bertini** (Under-Secretary-General for Management) said that, upon her assumption of office, she had embarked on a review of the status of implementation of the recommendations of OIOS, most of which had been accepted by her predecessor in office. She had retained the global consulting firm of Deloitte & Touche to provide guidance on the way forward. The firm had noted that the recommendations of OIOS indicated not a collapse of procedures and controls but gaps in the processes and the absence of audit trails. One important finding was that the Fund had unique characteristics compared to other pension funds.

65. The Office of Internal Oversight Services had withdrawn three of its 29 recommendations and implementation of 21 others, which concerned procedures and controls, was under way. Many of the remaining recommendations concerned human rights and staffing issues, and therefore went beyond the purview of the Investment Management Service. She had adopted a two-track approach to review control and management mechanisms, with input from the Pension Board on some issues. The process of selection of the new Director to lead the Investment Management Service into the future was also well under way. The staff of the Service were dedicated United Nations civil servants who were responsible for managing a very large Fund that had shown signs of a strong recovery in recent months and she was confident that the basic procedures of the Fund were well in hand.

66. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) asked whether the services of the non-discretionary investment advisers would be retained in the light of the OIOS finding that there was no evidence to indicate that their use had added any significant value to the decision-making process for individual equity transactions. He also sought clarification as to whether the Administration now accepted the need for a special code of ethics for staff involved in investment operations in line with standard investment industry practices.

67. **Ms. Bertini** (Under-Secretary-General for Management), in response to the comments of the representative of the United States of America, said that it was not fair to suggest that the Secretary-General had not felt the need for a code of ethics. In truth, the issue had not been addressed before OIOS had drawn attention to it, but a number of the financial advisers had also mentioned the need for such a code to

her. She assured the Committee that a strict code of ethics for staff members involved in investment operations would be introduced.

68. As far as non-discretionary investment advisers were concerned, they served as research staff and were employed on a contractual basis. In the course of the current review, the Department of Management would be evaluating their role and the cost-effectiveness of their services, bearing in mind the Organization's ongoing need for investment advice.

Agenda item 120: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*) (A/58/7, and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/58/154 and A/58/217)

Construction of additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa (*continued*)

Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (*continued*)

69. **Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan) said that he had taken note of the ten-month delay in the implementation of the project to build additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. He believed that the Secretariat had taken the best course of action under the circumstances and urged it to continue with its efforts to push the project forward.

70. Turning to the United Nations web site, he took the view that public information activities should not be restricted to the six official languages. In terms of financing, he felt that any additional expenditure required for the enhancement of the web site should be provided through the redeployment of existing resources and, in that connection, recalled the principles set out in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

71. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia), with reference to the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/58/217), said that his delegation commended the efforts of the Secretary-General. In recent years, the Arabic version of the web site had been getting an increasing number of hits; additional financial and human resources were therefore required if that momentum was to be retained. Considerable effort was needed to maintain the Arabic site, especially in terms of translating documentation from the other official languages and placing it on the site; he therefore called for the allocation of the necessary posts for that purpose.

72. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria), with reference to the report of the Secretary-General on the construction of additional office facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa (A/58/154), recalled that the General Assembly had repeatedly stressed the need for all United Nations offices and agencies to be treated fairly and equally, and it was for that reason that the construction work in Addis Ababa had been approved by resolution 56/270. She therefore wished to express her dissatisfaction at the ten-month delay in the implementation of the project.

73. With regard to paragraph 4 of the report, she did not understand how bids from poorly qualified architectural and engineering firms could have made it past the initial vetting process and she asked for clarification in that connection.

74. She also wished to know whether the project would now proceed in line with the revised schedule contained in paragraph 8 of the report or whether further delays were anticipated. Moreover, she noted that the funds for the construction work had already been released, and, in that connection, inquired whether, given the difficulties already encountered, those funds would be adequate to meet the costs of the project.

75. **Mr. Hao** Bin (China) said that the United Nations web site in all official languages provided the general public in the Member States with an effective tool that allowed them direct and rapid access to information about the Organization. The United Nations News Centre in Chinese had become operational just before the opening of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, thereby enabling more Chinese speakers to consult the site. That would undoubtedly increase the influence of the Organization in China.

76. Nonetheless, parity among the official languages on the web site had yet to be achieved. It was a source of concern to his delegation that the Chinese site, in particular, was suffering from weak capacity and a shortage of material. In accordance with decision 57/579, the Secretary-General had been requested to

enhance parity among the official languages through the redeployment of existing human and material resources, and he urged all those concerned to pursue their efforts in that direction.

77. **Mr. Eljy** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he supported the enhancement of the United Nations web site with a view to achieving complete parity among the six official languages. He was pleased that the popularity of the site among the general public was increasing, a trend that was due in no small part to multilingualism, and was convinced that the number of hits it received would continue to rise. The web site was a useful tool with which to publicize the objectives of the Department of Public Information and of the Organization as a whole and, in that respect, he reaffirmed the need to allocate the necessary resources for that purpose. He had also taken note with satisfaction of the linkage of the Official Documents System (ODS) to the web site and the consequent availability of United Nations documents in all six official languages.

78. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the Department of Public Information, the Arabic pages were still not of the same quality as the pages in other languages. He, therefore encouraged the Department to request additional human and financial resources in order to rectify that situation and ensure that all six official languages were on an equal footing.

79. He stressed the importance of respecting the principles of the impartiality of information in documents published in all official languages and of the simultaneous publication of documents in all those languages. He was surprised that some departments were failing to respect the latter principle.

80. **Mr. Belov** (Chief of the Common Services Unit), in response to the questions raised by the representative of Nigeria, said that the initial bidding exercise for architectural and engineering services had been conducted on the basis of the original schedule set out in document A/57/322. The outcome of that exercise had been unexpected, and the decision to re-bid had caused the ten-month delay referred to in paragraph 7 of the Secretary-General's report. However, there was no indication at the present time that the construction project would be subject to further delays and the revised schedule, as set out in paragraph 8 of the report, was being adhered to.

81. With regard to the financing of the project, he said that the US$ 7.7 million budget approved in 2002 by the General Assembly for the project was currently in the construction-in-progress account and would not be used for any other purpose.

82. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) asked whether the design and preparation of tender and construction documents, which was due to take place from September 2003 to May 2004, had begun.

83. **Mr. Belov** (Chief of the Common Services Unit) said that work had indeed started on that stage of the project. He expected that the relevant documents would be prepared on time.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.